SEPTEMBER 11, 1986 4:33PM ET

Paul McCartney: The Rolling Stone Interview

The former Beatle on his new album ‘Press to Play,’ the breakup of his old band and going gray

By **KURT LODER**

It is Monday in London, two days before the royal wedding, and Soho Square is filled with flowers, sunshine and fresh-faced young tourists. Some loll on the grass, sharing joints. Others peer up expectantly at the etched-glass windows of an art-deco-style town house across the street, where, in an airy third-floor office, Paul McCartney presides over the bustling affairs of MPL Communications, the company that manages the professional projects of the singer and his wife, Linda. McCartney is in from his country home in Sussex – where he has a brand-new, state-of-the-art recording studio – to promote his latest LP, *Press to Play*. It is the fifteenth album he has released since he announced the breakup of the Beatles back in 1970, and the years are beginning to tell: his hair is mostly gray these days. But he’s as buoyant as ever, bubbling with enthusiasm. After eight years of largely lackadaisical releases on Columbia, he is back with Capitol – the Beatles’ old label – and he seems serious about rehabilitating his somewhat tattered artistic reputation.

Press to Play features some good new songs and a tough new pop sound, courtesy of Hugh Padgham, who coproduced it. Linda McCartney’s background vocals are the only aural remnant of Paul’s

erstwhile band Wings; this time out he's backed by guitarists Eric Stewart and Carlos Alomar, drummer Rick Marrotta and such drop-in rock-star pals as Pete Townshend and Phil Collins. Pouring tea from a china pot, McCartney talks up his new tunes (one song, "However Absurd," is a stream-of-consciousness stew of non sequiturs lifted from the works of such poets as W.H. Auden) and his ambitious plans for the future. But he cannot ignore his celebrated past and the persistent tug of its emotional undertow. Will he ever again be seen in as sweet a light as that which illuminated the Beatles twenty years ago? The subject seems open for discussion. Paulie passes the cream.

On your new album, there's an almost punkish song called "Angry." That's not an attitude usually associated with Paul McCartney. What are you angry about?

Well, the same things a lot of us are angry about.

Traffic jams, stuff like that?

Well, there's that – the day-to-day piss-offs. But I was thinking more about, um, British trade unions withdrawing coal when there's old ladies dying, and we kind of just go, "Yeah, well, the union's got a right." And Britain's attitude toward apartheid at the moment, which is just so crazy. I mean, *still*, after all those years of Martin Luther King and everything, they're *still* buggerin' around with black and white. It's so *insane*. Couldn't they just wise up? But there's Maggie saying, "We don't need to do sanctions," while everybody else – all the civil-rights groups – are saying, "But you *do*."

Given such views, it's ironic that a London tabloid, *The Sun*, recently questioned whether you were a racist after hearing bootleg Beatles outtakes from the *Let It Be* sessions that feature you referring to Pakistanis – unflatteringly, it seems – in a rendition of "Get Back."

Sensational journalism – *The Sun* is not a highly reputable newspaper. What this thing is, I think, is that when we were doing *Let It Be*, there were a couple of verses to "Get Back" which were actually not racist at all – they were *anti*racist. There were a lot of stories in the newspapers

then about Pakistanis crowding out flats – you know, living sixteen to a room or whatever. So in one of the verses of "Get Back," which we were making up on the set of *Let It Be*, one of the outtakes has something about "too many Pakistanis living in a council flat" – that's the line. Which to me was actually talking out *against* overcrowding for Pakistanis. *The Sun* wishes to see it as a racist remark. But I'll tell you, if there was any group that was not racist, it was the Beatles. I mean, all our favorite people were always black. We were kind of the first people to open international eyes, in a way, to Motown. Whenever we came to the States they'd say, "Who's your favorite artists?" And we'd say, "Well, they're mainly black, and American – Motown, man. It's all there, you've got it all." I don't think the Beatles ever had much of a hang-up with that.

What about sensationalism in rock & roll – the alleged surfeit of sex and violence that many of the music's critics seem to find these days. Do you worry that your children are being influenced by this sort of thing?

No. I think they're into pretty good music, actually – Simple Minds, Dire Straits, Tears for Fears, stuff like that. I've never tried to favor anything, 'cause I figure I wouldn't have liked my dad to sort of *tell* me to like Elvis, you know? It would have put me off it.

Are you familiar with the PMRC in the States – the group of Washington wives who want ratings for pop records?

Oh, the lyrics thing. Uh . . . I kind of see their point, you know? I think there is a point, like with newspapers, where you start to want to censor stuff. I don't *really* think you ought to, but . . . Let's say a really great group emerged – and you tend to think they'd be heavy metal, although that's probably "heavy metallist" to say [laughs] – and say they were advocating, I don't know, killing, Satanism. And they came out with a really great album and turned a lot of people on to Satanism. There's got to be a point where you're gonna say, "Look, guys, we're all for artistic freedom, but maybe we just don't want *de*

debbil trampling across America at the moment." I mean, what would you do? I don't know. I think censorship's very dangerous. . . .
But things are getting farther and farther out I saw a show the other night on television which . . . I was not *offended* by – I mean, it doesn't really bug me – but it made me start to wonder whether people were going slightly far out. It was a gay thing, and a couple of guys were really gettin' to it. Now, I have no objection to anyone getting their rocks off in *any* way they want. But maybe public telly isn't the forum for it. And video nasties – *I Drill Your Brain*, *I Spit on Your Grave*. I haven't seen those movies myself – I'm gettin' to be an old fruit, you know? – but how far ought they to let that go? I think, in a way, that it doesn't really hurt to have someone keepin' an eye on all this stuff. It's not a bad thing to have watchdog groups; you just mustn't let them get too much power.

In a more positive vein, you've actively supported other causes you believe in, such as Live Aid.

I'm not a great joiner, but I do support a lot of things. I've supported Amnesty International for a while, and of course Live Aid, obviously, was – *is* – a great thing.

Are you troubled by reports that the money Live Aid raised for Ethiopia ultimately benefits that country's military regime and not the starving people?

Well, before Live Aid, there was going to be another concert of that sort, and Dave Gilmour and myself were going to get involved in it. Then a neighbor of mine, David Astor, who was quite big in Amnesty at the time, told me that his son was in Eritrea at that moment and that there was very worrying news coming out. He said, "If you do charity, it's going to go straight to the military. They say, 'Thank you very much for helping our country. *We're* not buying food for our people, we're spending our money on guns.'" So, at the time of Live Aid, I did a little bit of work on that, checked it out – me, Astor, Pete Townshend, a few other people. And we decided that Bob Geldof had enough good people on the case. We wanted to do *something*, even if

there was some risk – I mean, we were seeing people on television just *dying* in front of the camera.

So I was glad to have done Live Aid. Someone's always gonna bitch. There's always gonna be a bad side to everything you do. When I did "Ebony and Ivory" with Stevie Wonder – which was a perfectly harmless attempt at pinpointing the need for racial harmony – some people said, "Oh, it's just pap." Well – *sez you*, you know? I mean, tough. The point is, there *is* some kind of black-and-white problem – certainly in South Africa, probably less now in the States, but there's still tension, it still erupts. You can't deny that. I just wanted to do something good, to do a song that I thought might take a little tension out of the situation. And there were a few great things I got off it. Like, there's a great black sax player in Los Angeles, Ernie Watts. I think he's got a white wife, and he came up to me at a session we did, and he said, "Oh, man, thanks for that song." And that made it all worthwhile for me, you know – just if one person's situation was alleviated to the tiniest degree. I don't care what *all* the critics say then; that's really enough. Ernie Watts plays a hell of a lot better than any critic I ever heard.

But do you think there's any merit to the frequent charge that your post-Beatles music has gotten too soft?

Yeah, I'm sure it's true. You can't get it right all the time. If there's been a fault with my stuff, I think some of it was unfinished. Looking back on some of it now, I think, "You didn't finish the bloody thing." So . . . yeah, I might have been a bit soft, and some of it might have been a bit unfinished. And sometimes a critic will say, "That's really lousy" – and I'll tend to agree with him: "He's right, it's not very good, that one." I know there are quite a few tracks on my albums that I just don't like now. Like "Bip Bop," off *Wild Life* – oh, God, I can't listen to it; it just goes *nowhere*. But occasionally a good one comes along, and occasionally there's a little wave on the little millpond, and that makes it all worthwhile.

Critics may be pleased by the harder pop sound of *Press to Play*. Some of the tracks have an almost experimental tilt to them.

The funny thing is, there was a time when *I* was the avant-garde one in the Beatles – around the time of *Sgt. Pepper*, 'cause that album was largely my influence. I thought of the idea, the concept of pretending we were another group. I was trying to get everyone in the group to be sort of farther out, and do this far-out album. John was living out in Weybridge with his wife and child at the time, and *I* was bein' the bachelor in London – living on my own, going to the theater, checking out the *International Times*, Allen Ginsberg. It was a pretty rich period. I used to make 8-mm home movies and show them one frame at a time – *flick, flick, flick* – which made them last about an hour, when they only should have been ten minutes, you know? I remember showing them to Antonioni – I think he was in town filming *Blow-Up* – and Keith Richards. We had some nice evenings – quite *stoned* evenings, I must admit – just watching these movies. I still have them. And I was into Stockhausen, and I used to make a lot of home tape loops and just send them to friends for, like, a buzz. I remember sayin' to John once, "I'm gonna do an album of this and call it *Paul McCartney Goes Too Far*." And he said, "Yeah, you've gotta do it, man!" So *I* was the one who introduced John, originally, to a lot of that stuff. In fact, not many people know this, but Yoko came to my house before she met John. There was a charity thing – it was rather avant-garde, something to do with John Cage or something – and she wanted lyrics, manuscripts. I hate to tell you, but I really didn't want to give her any of my lyrics – you know, selfish, or whatever, but I just didn't want to do it. So I said, "But there's a friend of mine who might want to help – my mate, John."

So you were the catalyst for John and Yoko's relationship?

Well, I don't know that. But I kind of put her on to John, and then they really hit it off – it was like a *wild fire*, you know? John was certainly in love. Um . . . a little *insecurely* in love, 'cause he warned me off Yoko

– sort of said, “Look, no, no.” ‘Cause he knew I was a bit of a lady’s man – I liked the girls, no doubt about that. And I said, “Yeah, okay.” I mean, I wasn’t *about to*, anyway, but he didn’t know that.

You became involved with Linda Eastman instead. Has it been difficult to sustain such a controversial union over the last sixteen years?

Well, we’ve been up, we’ve been down, we’ve been in love, we’ve been out of love – we’ve been every which way, you know? It’s certainly not been as idyllic as it looks on the surface. It’s a *real marriage*, believe me – as real as any other marriage. The bottom line is that we love each other, and what’s more, we *like* each other. It sounds corny, but what else can I say?

Thinking about you and Linda, and John and Yoko, inevitably recalls the end of the Beatles. After all this time, the cause of the group’s breakup still seems murky. What really happened?

The actual story in my mind is that it was all getting a bit sticky during the White Album. And *Let It Be* was very sticky – George left the group then, and so did Ringo, but we managed to patch that back up. The dates are all purple haze to me, but at some point – after *Let It Be* was finished, and about the time I was wanting to put the *McCartney* album out – we had a meeting at the Apple office, and it was like “Look, something’s wrong, and we’ve got to sort it out.” I had my suggestion: I said, “What I think we ought to do is get back as a band – get back as the little unit we always were. I think we ought to hit small clubs and do a little tour.” I just wanted to *learn* to be a band together again, ’cause we’d become a business group. We’d become *businessmen*. So that was my big suggestion. And John looked me in the eye and he said, “I think you’re daft. In fact, I wasn’t gonna tell you . . . but I’m leavin’ the group.” To my recollection, those were his exact words. And our jaws dropped. And then he went on to explain that it was rather a good feelin’ to get it off his chest – a bit like when he told his wife about a divorce, that he’d had a sort of feeling of relief. Which

was very nice for him, but we didn't get much of a good feeling.
At first we agreed not to announce it. But after three or four months, I got more and more guilty about people saying, "How's the group going?" when we sort of knew it was probably split up. So I did a kind of dumb move in the end, and when I look back on it, it was really . . . it looks very hard and cold. But I was releasing the *McCartney* album, and I didn't really want to do much press for it; so I told a guy from the office to do me a list of questions and I'll write the answers and we'll print it up as a pamphlet and just stick it in with the press copies of the album. The questions were quite pointed, and it ended up being like me announcing that the Beatles had broken up. John got quite mad about that, apparently – this is one of the things he said really hurt him and cut him to the quick. Personally, I don't think it was such a bad thing to announce to the world after *four months* that we'd broken up. It had to come out sometime. I think maybe the manner of doing it I regret now – I wish it had been a little kinder, or with the others' approval. But I felt it was time.

Weren't the others also upset that your album, *McCartney*, was released a month before *Let It Be*?

Yeah, I think John thought I was using this press release for publicity – as I suppose, in a way, I was. So it all looked very weird, and it ruffled a few feathers. The good thing about it was that we all had to finally own up to the fact that we'd broken up three or four months before. We'd been ringing each other quite constantly, sort of saying, "Let's get it back together again." And I think me, George and Ringo *did* want to save things. But I think John was, at that point, too heavily into his new life – which you can't blame him for. He'd always wanted to be a little more avant-garde, and so living in New York, and Yoko's influence, obviously helped him do that. It was very exciting for him on a lot of levels. So it became clear about that time that the group wasn't gonna get back together. And that was it.

Did it sadden you to see Lennon subsequently drift off into heroin addiction?

Yeah, I really didn't like that. Unfortunately, he was driftin' away from *us* at that point, so none of us actually *knew*. He never told us; we heard rumors, and we were very sad. But he'd embarked on a new course, which really involved anything and everything. Because John was that kind of a guy – he wanted to live his life to the full as he saw it. He would often say things like, "If you find yourself at the edge of a cliff and you wonder whether you should jump off or not – try jumping." And I am afraid I would always say, "No, man, I'm not gonna jump off that cliff; I don't care how good it is." I remember we had dinner one night – just a friendly dinner, just bein' mates – and I remember John saying he was thinking of having this trepanning thing done: drilling a hole in the skull. The Romans or the Greeks or somebody used to do it, so that gave it a validity in John's mind, I think. And he said, "Would you be up for that? Do you fancy doin' that? We could go and get it done." I said, "Why?" He said, "It relieves the pressure on your brain." I said, "Look, *you* go try it, and if it's great, you tell me, and maybe I'll do it."

That was the kind of stuff that was floatin' around then. I just feel very lucky to have said no to those things. 'Cause at the time, I felt *bad* about sayin' no. I thought, "Oh, here I go again, look at me, unadventurous, I'm always the one, they're gonna make such fun of me." I mean, I got such pressure when I wouldn't take acid the first time. I got a *lot* of pressure there.

Was it like the group sitting around all dropping acid, and you . . .

Yeah. They were sayin', "What's wrong with him?" *Now*, looking back on it, I think, *Jesus*, I must have had some courage to actually resist that peer pressure. But at the time, I felt really goody-goody, you know: "Hey, Mr. Clean, squeaky clean," you know? It was like "Aw, come on, fellas, I'm not *really* squeaky clean, but, you know, acid is maybe gonna do our heads in."

But you eventually did try LSD.

Yeah, finally. In actual fact, it was because John had done it by

mistake one evening. We turned up for a session at Abbey Road, and he thought he'd taken a pep pill – speed, or whatever – to sort of wake him up for the evening, but it turned out to be acid. He had a little pillbox, and he'd taken the wrong pill. This was around the time of *Sgt. Pepper*. Well, we didn't get a lot done that night. John came over and said, "Jeez, I'm trippin'." And we all went, "Ahhh . . . okay. Keep cool, lad. Now, is this a good place to be tripping?" He said, "No, not really." Okay. George Martin didn't know. We said, "George, John's not feeling too well" – so George took him *up on the roof!* We said, "Maybe that's not a good idea, George." I said, "Tell you what, I'll take him home." So I took him home, and that was my first trip, that night, because I figured, you know, I can't leave the guy on his own – he was all *aowooommm*. . . .

Your apparent preference for marijuana has made many headlines over the years. Do you still indulge?

I don't talk about stuff like that no more – it's too crazy. Where I *was* lucky was with my avoidance of heroin. I went through most of the other stuff, and I had a friend in the Sixties who was getting into heroin. He said to me, "Man, the thing about heroin is that it's okay as long as you've got the money to support the habit – there's no problem as long as you can pay. And you're not likely to have a problem with that, so it's cool." But something in my brain went *djing!* – a little light went on – and I said, "No, this is wrong." So I was very lucky. I said, "No thanks," and avoided that scene. And I thank God that I did, because a lot of my friends *didn't*, and they went through some *horror zones*, you know? Some of them didn't come out of it.

It's sobering to realize that the recreational drug taking of the Sixties, which seemed so lighthearted, has resulted in the wall-to-wall drug scene of today – which is anything but.

I think a lot of it's been caused by people's ignorance of the drug scene – like lumping marijuana with heroin, saying, "Well, one leads to the other." I always say to them, "Well, booze leads to it just as easily, and cigarettes lead to booze, and so on. It all leads to each other." I

personally think that if the older generation had been more sensible, instead of busting people and using scare tactics . . .

Like the scare stories about cocaine in the States recently.

I'm not sure about coke. I'm not into that. Again, I was lucky, because I *was* into that just before the entire record industry got into it. I was into it at the time of *Sgt. Pepper*, actually. And the guys in the group were a bit, kind of, "Hey, wait a minute, that's a little heavier than we've been getting into." And I was doing the traditional coke thing – "No problem, man, it's just a little toot, no problem." It was all very lightweight, really. But I remember one evening I went down to a club, and somebody was passin' coke around, and I was feelin' so great, and I came back from the toilet – and suddenly I just got *the plunge*, you know? The *drop*. And somebody said, "Have some more. Come on, get back up again." I said, "No, man, this isn't gonna work." I mean, anything with that big a downside. . . Anyway, I could never stand that feelin' at the back of the throat – it was like you were chokin', you know? So I knocked that on the head. I just thought, "This is not fun." I must say, since we're gettin' into drugs – and at the risk of sounding goody-goody again – that I do personally feel, from this perspective, today, that my favorite thing is to be clean and straight. I think you can enjoy your life better that way. I mean, when we were very straight in the Beatles, we did music that was pretty much as far out as the stuff we did later. Maybe it wasn't *as* far out, but actually, beneath the surface, it was every bit as meaningful.

On a more trivial but similarly ancient note, a new biography of you claims that Paul McCartney, the world's most famous left-handed bassist, is actually right-handed. True?

No, I'm quite definitely left-handed. When I first got a guitar, I couldn't understand what was wrong with it, 'cause I really couldn't get it together. I felt so unrhythmic – so *white*, you know? Suddenly I was, like, whiter than I'd ever been. I just had no rhythm in my hands. Then I saw a picture of Slim Whitman – now *there's* a name to conjure

with – and he had his guitar the wrong way round. He was the first lefty I'd ever seen, and I said, "Hey, shit, that's it: turn the guitar upside down." After that, my strumming hand got a little blacker again.

Did you feel similarly reassured when Jimi Hendrix turned up on the London scene?

Yeah, Jimi was brilliant. I knew him and loved him. The first time I saw him was down at a club – I think it was the Bag o' Nails – and I was just completely blown away. I'd never seen anyone turn their amp up that high. He'd wind up a hundred-watt Marshall and hit his guitar, and it'd go *beyowww-whoot-rowww!* Fantastic! Townshend and Eric Clapton were in the audience, and me – all checking Jimi out – and our jaws were just droppin'. He had such expertise – he really knew his way around a guitar. And he was a very sweet guy, very quietly spoken, very enthusiastic. The greatest compliment he ever paid me was when the Beatles did *Sgt. Pepper*. The album was released on a Friday night, and on Sunday Jimi played a little gig that Brian Epstein used to run called the Savile Theatre – and he opened with "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band": *boom-boom-bahhhm, boom-boom-bahhhm!* Oh, man, that was so good. I mean, it had only been out for two days!

So, yeah, I have very fond memories of Jimi. I mean, Van Halen's great – I love Eddie Van Halen – but I still think Jimi was the best.

After John Lennon conquered his drug problem, did the two of you finally patch up your personal relationship?

We were submerged in business troubles at the time. There was incredible bitterness. At one point, to get some peace in the camp, I told my lawyers I wanted to give John an indemnity he had been seeking against a certain clause in one of the Apple contracts. I said, "Someone's gotta make the first move. I'd love to be the voice of reason here." I happened to be on my way to the Caribbean, so, passing through New York, I rang John up. But there was so much suspicion, even though I came bearing the olive branch. I said, "Hey,

I'd like to see you." He said, "What for? What do you *really* want?" It was very difficult. Finally . . . he had a great line for me: he said, "You're all pizza and fairy tales." He'd become sort of Americanized by then, so the best insult I could think of was to say, "Oh, fuck off, Kojak," and slam the phone down. "Pizza and fairy tales" – I almost made that an album title.

That was about the strength of our relationship then – very, very bitter – and we didn't get over that for a long, long time. But thank God, at the very end, we suddenly realized that all we had to do was not mention Apple if we phoned each other. We could talk about the kids, talk about his cats, talk about writin' songs – the one paramount thing was not to mention Apple. So then the last couple of phone calls we had were getting very nice. I remember once he said to me, "Do they play me against you like they play you against me?" Because there were always people in the background pitting us against each other. And I said, "Yeah, they do. They sure do." That was a couple of months before he . . . it's still weird even to say, "before he died." I still can't come to terms with that. I still don't believe it. It's like, you know, those dreams you have, where he's still alive; then you wake up and . . . "Oh."

It was all so tragic. But I do feel thankful that the last few years of his life were very happy, from what I can gather. He was always a very warm guy, John. His bluff was all on the surface. He used to take his glasses down – those granny glasses – take 'em down and say, "It's only me." They were like a wall, you know? A shield. Those are the moments I treasure. I suppose we hurt each other and stuff, but I keep looking at all the evidence of how I hurt him, and I don't know – it doesn't seem quite as bad as I think he was making it.

I just read about this thing that's going on sale at Sotheby's – this Apple booklet with John's comments in the margins in his own handwriting. It is so bitter. Like, there's a picture of Paul and Linda's wedding – and John's crossed out "wedding" and written in "funeral." I think it starts to tell there. Another caption says, "Paul goes to

Hollywood" – and then he's apparently written in the margin, "To cut Yoko and John out of the film." He often thought that we were tryin' to cut Yoko out of things, to cut her out of *Let It Be*. I suppose we were, in some degree; because she wasn't in the Beatles, and it was a Beatles film, and it wasn't absolutely necessary to have long footage of her in there. She certainly *was in there*, but obviously they felt she should be in there a little more. I bent over backward trying to see John's point of view. I still bend over backward trying to not malign him.

You do seem to have been cast as the heavy in the Beatles' breakup.

It isn't pleasant. A lot of the accusations John made in public were slightly wild. I mean . . . maybe we should've taken to Yoko a little better. I often *do* feel not too clever about not taking to her, because we didn't get on too well. She was very *different* from anything we'd encountered. A lot of people still find her a little difficult to take. I figure, well, he loved her, so it's nothin' to do with me – I should respect her through him. And I felt that I tried to do that. But we were being so set against each other that his unreasonable bitterness was almost inevitable, I think. It's such a pity he felt that way. But the bottom line is we loved each other. And I'm glad to be getting back to some semblance of sanity with George and Ringo now – we can meet and hug and say we love each other, you know?

Might the three of you ever record together again?

I don't know. I'd like to. But it's a touchy affair. I think all of us, rather than get the world's press on our backs, would rather just play that aspect down for now. But I'd like to. And I know George and I have talked once or twice about maybe just plonking a couple of acoustics together. So that whole scene is warming up a bit, which is nice. It's such a breath of fresh air – and it's been a long time coming, you know? So I see hope for the future in that direction. But I don't want to rush it. I don't want to put anyone off. I'll just play it by ear. Just let it happen. We were talking about doing a Beatles movie a couple of years ago: slinging in home movies and old outtakes, adding narration – the

definitive Beatles story. We were going to call it *The Long and Winding Road*. We asked Dick Lester to direct it, but he said no one would be interested. Two months later, *The Compleat Beatles* came out on video – and it's still in the video charts. So Dick was wrong: there's quite a big market. And we have all the *Let It Be* outtakes. And I have a beautiful piece of footage from that Dezo Hoffmann photo session with the Beatles on the beach in old-fashioned bathing suits. It's fabulous, 'cause John is doing this beautiful Charleston – which his mother taught him how to do. I love it. I'd still like to do that movie. I talked to Steven Spielberg about it, and he was much more encouraging than Dick Lester. He said Martin Scorsese might be a good person to talk to.

Meanwhile, I'm thinking of getting a band together myself. I know the Beatles used to say, "We won't be rock & rollin' when we're forty," but I still love it. The Prince's Trust benefit just zonked me out: looking around and seeing Eric Clapton, Mark Knopfler, Bryan Adams, Elton, Tina – there was such a buzz on that stage. I think they were glad to see me sort of vaguely gettin' it on. I sang "I Saw Her Standing There" and "Long Tall Sally," too – in the original key! It really felt great. I could do that every night. So I'd like to get a band. I don't know if I'll call it Wings – maybe some new incarnation.

Whatever may happen, will you be leaving the gray in your hair? It looks very distinguished.

Yeah, I'm leaving that. When you're past forty, the game is up, you know? My wife actually likes it. Ringo told me off about it, though – he reckoned I ought to color it. I think he's kind of gaugin' himself by how old I look – like I make *him* feel old if I look a bit old. But what the hell, you know? This is life. We're all gettin' older every second. My main thing is just to try and enjoy it. And I'm very surprised to find that, more often than not, I really do.